

# Inspiration on TCM Translation Through the Analysis of *The Yellow Emperor's Canon Internal Medicine* Translated by Liansheng Wu and Qi Wu

Yishan Yang<sup>1</sup> Ya Liu<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1,2</sup> School of Foreign Languages, Hubei University of Chinese Medicine, Wuhan, Hubei, China

<sup>2</sup>Corresponding author.

## ABSTRACT

With the development of TCM translation, TCM has intrigued numerous people in the modern society. However, a series of shortages in TCM translation have become the point that people concerned. For example, people majoring in TCM translation lack the professional knowledge of TCM. What's more, discrepancy in culture causes ambiguities, which makes translation more challengeable, and some terms in TCM are uneasy to be delivered in target languages accurately. Among all TCM translations, the translation of classical works *The Yellow Emperor's Canon Internal Medicine* by Liansheng Wu and Qi Wu is popularized and widespread. Thus, in order to overcome difficulties appearing in the process of translation and spread TCM culture better, the author will conduct an in-depth study on Liansheng Wu and Qi Wu's thoughts of TCM translation on the basis of the Functional Equivalence Theory from the follow aspects: amplification, transliteration, conversion and repetition. Finally, it is easy to find that their thoughts on TCM translation play an important role in dealing with difficulties in TCM translation and promoting the spread of TCM.

**Keywords:** TCM, Functional equivalence theory, *The Yellow Emperor's Canon Internal Medicine*, Translation theory.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

At present, China attaches great importance to the development of TCM. Meanwhile, more and more countries in the world have begun to pay attention to TCM, and the development of TCM has entered a critical period. Therefore, people should seize this opportunity to further promote the spread and development of TCM. However, there are some shortcomings in TCM translation, which will influence the realization of our targets. Therefore, people should find an effective solution to the problem. Actually, it is uneasy to use one kind of language to reproduce works created in another language in a totally different way (Zhiqian Cao, 2015: 177-178). Thus, the analysis of TCM translation methods is the key to the spread of TCM. The translation theory, delivered by Liansheng Wu and Qi Wu, can be applied to medical English, literary translation, travel English, business English, film and television translation and other fields. Nowadays, Chinese translators begin to learn their

theories, which are of vital necessity and importance to improve target texts. Their theories have been accepted by more and more people in the world. Therefore, in my mind, their theories are good for today's proliferation of the translation. In a nutshell, this paper will, from the perspective of the Functional Equivalence Theory, analyze the relevant translation strategies of *The Yellow Emperor's Canon Internal Medicine*, so as to deal with the existing problems in today's TCM translation.

## 2. CURRENT TRANSLATION PROBLEMS FOR TCM

At present, Chinese people continue to promote the spread of TCM via translation and people in other countries begin to accept TCM and its culture. So TCM translation plays a key role in the dissemination of TCM. However, there are still many difficulties along the way, which I will introduce in detailed next.

## 2.1 Related Knowledge

As we all know, most TCM practitioners are not good in English and on the other hand, English majors are not good at TCM. What's more, people who are major in TCM translation need to know too many knowledge of TCM, among them, ancient Chinese prose and professional terms are difficult. Thus, if a man wants to be a competent translator, he should master a wide range of knowledge, such as drug names, translation methods, Chinese and Western culture. However, not only English majors feel difficult, but also medical students feel complicated.

## 2.2 Different Cultures

Upon the TCM translation, differences in culture are quite challengeable. It is known that people's cognition depends on their residential culture. And culture depends on the place people living in for a long time. Thus, the influence of culture is unmovable and deep-rooted. People are difficult in understanding and accepting thoughts which are different from their own culture or cognition. In addition, TCM, as the crystal of thoughts, covers a wide range of professional knowledge and terms, which are difficult to be understood and translated. Next, here is an example quoted from the TCM classics. For example, “阴阳离合论” is translated as “Yin Yang Li He Lun” in *The Yellow Emperor's Canon internal medicine*. In TCM translation, many related terms, such as “阳气”, are translated into “Yang Qi” by some people and “Yang energy” by others. So it is easy to find that different people have different ideas about the same subject. On the other hand, this kind of vocabulary without fixed translation method may lead to ambiguities due to the limitation of readers' knowledge.

## 2.3 Professional Terms

The translation of TCM professional terms is not easy. After all, there are no professional terms of TCM in English respectively. Translators need to create some terms covering the original meaning, and master the existing terms in English. No matter which terms or words they use, one point they must pay close attention to is that they must follow the original meaning and make them translation suitable to target readers' cognition in the maximum extent. More accurate their translation is, more convenient readers will be. Only by grasping the coherence of the text, the logical clues and the

cohesive relationship of words, translators can accurately transform source language into target language, so that readers can mostly obtain the information of the original text without changing its meaning. What's more, people cannot change the original meaning for the sake of brevity.

## 3. INTRODUCTIONS OF *THE YELLOW EMPEROR'S CANON INTERNAL MEDICINE* TRANSLATED BY LIANSHENG WU AND QI WU

As one of the four classic works of TCM, *The Yellow Emperor's Canon internal medicine* is a comprehensive medical work, which contains nature, biology, psychology and society. The material of the book mainly comes from the ancients' long-term observation of life phenomena and a large number of clinical practices. In *The Yellow Emperor's Canon internal medicine* translation, many universal translation methods are used, such as direct translation method, amplification method, omission method and so on. Of course, traditional Chinese medicine translation is different from general translation. Some details of theory adopted in Liansheng Wu and Qi Wu's translation are elucidated in the following pages.

### 3.1 Liansheng Wu and Qi Wu's Edition

Their translations of this classic win them golden award on the World Traditional Medicine. While retaining the original meaning of the article, they displayed *The Yellow Emperor's Canon internal medicine* to the world in the closest form in the target language. First of all, *The Yellow Emperor's Canon internal medicine* contains rich knowledge and culture of ancient Chinese medicine and plays an irreplaceable role in the development of modern Chinese medicine. When people talk about *The Yellow Emperor's Canon internal medicine*, the concept of “天” naturally appears. In the work translated by Liansheng Wu and Qi Wu, they translated “天” into “heaven”, not “nature”. After all, in Chinese culture, “heaven” is regarded as nature, while in the minds of Westerners, “天” is “God, heaven”. Therefore, in the translation of Liansheng Wu and Qi Wu, this concept is well transformed to make it easier for Westerners to understand.

### 3.2 Analysis of Translation Methods

Translators should juggle the source language with the target language. It is known that TCM is of vital importance in Chinese history. Thus, related practitioners should maintain the linguistic features and styles of TCM and develop it further. For example, “内格” in *Su Wen*, there is a saying about “Neige” is that complying to Yin and Yang, if not, die; following it, you will be cured, otherwise, you will be infected to death. Therefore, “内格” can be understood as a disease. Liansheng Wu translated “内格” into “the disease of mutual excluding of yin and Yang”. What’s more, a Chinese character “关格”, which initially appeared in the *Neijing*, can be understood as a pulse. Although Liansheng Wu directly translated it into “Guan ge”, he added the note “it indicates both yin and yang are in utmost over allowance to cause the serving of them (failures in mutual supporting)” (Lu Tang, 2013: 86), to make readers understand the meaning of the word. Based on the above examples, it is easy to find that Liansheng Wu strictly retains the original meaning and form of the article and uses various translation methods to show the traditional Chinese medicine culture to foreigners. Next, I will introduce *The Yellow Emperor's Canon internal medicine* from four aspects, such as amplification, transliteration, conversion and repetition.

#### 3.2.1 Amplification

In general, people always add some short phrases or words and even sentences to make target texts better and more accurately. For example, if an English sentence lacks subject, what will it look like? Of course, people will regard it as wrong sentence structure, which may make reader misunderstand the original meaning and even make opposite judgement. Thus, in the C-E translation, translators always need to add subjects to make sentences complete. Besides, the passive tense or the sentence pattern can be adopted, such as “there be...” “It is + adj. + to do sth.”, to translate sentences without subject. For example, in *The Yellow Emperor's Canon internal medicine* translation, there is a saying without talking about what will happen if people get rid of their own essence and energy literally. But Liansheng Wu added such translation “When the essence and vital energy of a man or woman being exhausted, it is impossible for them to have any child.” (Liansheng Wu, 1997: 11). In this translation, the source text cannot be translated directly, but it can also be creatively added with some words and phrases. “It

is also impossible for...” is added to highlight the bad effects, which will occur if people, male or female, get rid of their own essence and energy. Besides, it also corresponds to the previous part “there is still impossible for them to...” in translation. After all, English speakers prefer a symmetrical beauty in passage, which makes the article easy to be read. There is another example, “阳气者” in the original text is translated by translators as “Yang energy in human body”, which corresponds to the following “sun in the sky”, to pursue a kind of rhythmic beauty. In addition, “夫其所” is translated into “when the sun is not at its proper position” and “when the Yang energy of a man is not at his proper position”, these two sentences are examples of amplification. This kind of translation method can make translation more clearly and accurately.

#### 3.2.2 Transliteration

Transliteration method only retains the sounding and writing form of the original language. Therefore, People always find a lot of parentheses in transliteration method, which is in order to explain the meaning of the above characters or sounding. For example, “朋克” is “punk”, “克隆” is “clone” and so on. Of course, some of them originate from Chinese and others from English. No matter where they originate from, they have similar sounding rather than the same meaning. Towards TCM translation, transliteration method is widely used in the translation of charter names. For example, “生气通天论” will be translated into “Sheng Qi Tong Tian Lun”. Of course, it will be followed by a bracket, which is the explanation of the word. What’s more, “Yin Yang Li He Lun (The Individual Activities and the Mutual Functions of Yin and Yang)”, which is the translation of “阴阳离合论”. In this way, readers can avoid misunderstanding and translators can fully convey the meaning of the original text to readers. Meanwhile, this method can also make translation easier under the circumstances that the original sound of language is retained and other countries are encouraged to understand and learn Chinese characters.

#### 3.2.3 Conversion

If you do it word by word, the translation will be difficult to be understood. And what the final destination of translation is? Absolutely, it aims to transmit the excellent cultures of countries worldwide. However, discrepancy in culture and

thoughts may cause ambiguities. Thus, people need to change the logical way of the original language and shift it into the logical way that suitable to the readers to make them get and understand the original meanings the writers prefer to express and transmit. Next, several examples will be shown to prove the above ideas and opinions. As for the conversion method, it often appears in *The Yellow Emperor's Canon Internal Medicine* translated by Liansheng Wu and Qi Wu. As the above-mentioned saying goes, “天地之精气”, the translation given by the translator is “the essence and vital energy of a man or woman” (Liansheng Wu, 1997: 10). Among this, it is worth noting that the translation of “天地之精气” is not translated into “the essence and vital energy of the heaven and the earth”, but into “the essence and vital energy of a man or woman”. In this translation, the earth and heaven symbolize the male and female. The method makes translation faithful in accordance with contents of the source text, so that readers can better understand contents of the article. In addition, the Chinese character “闻” in “余闻天为阳” is translated into “be told”, which changes its voice. Furthermore, there is also the same method adopted in this passage, “成” in “成一岁” is shifted into “is formed”. Why they do so? Because native English speakers prefer to use the passive voice, which can truly express the meaning of the article to the maximum. It is convenient for readers to understand. Then, there is the translation of “大小月”. Translators translate it into “the lunar months of 29 and 30 days” instead of “the big and small month”, which well expresses the meaning of the source text, and is not limited to its literal meaning.

#### 3.2.4 Repetition

When it comes to the repetition method, people can emphasize something by making these appear twice and more often. Besides, translation can be made more fluently and vivid through the adoption of this method. Sometimes, in E-C translation, some parts in the sentence need to be repeated to make translation better. As we all know, Chinese people like repeating some parts in their speaking and writing. However, the Western people prefer to avoid frequent appearance of same subject or object. For example, “You need to deal with and solve problems in our daily life”, in this sentence, the word “problems” doesn't appear twice, but if people translate it into Chinese, you will find that the word “problems” appears twice, “我们需要应对问题, 解决问题”. This is the obvious difference in the translation between Chinese and English. In *The*

*Yellow Emperor's Canon Internal Medicine* translation, there is an exemplary sentence, “五脏之气…此无色之见死也”. This sentence talks about patients' appearances with different color due to various of diseases, which are regarded as the basis for diagnosis. Herein lies the adoption of the repetition method, Let's focus on patients with different appearances in the original text, there has nothing relative to “when it appears”, but translators repeat such sentences when they mention patients with different symptoms respectively. And they take advantage of the amplification method and also the repetition method, the latter is adopted to make the target text more vivid and rhymed.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

As society develops, TCM has aroused the interest of countless people in modern society. Therefore, if a man plans to promote the development of TCM culture, he should spare no efforts to deal with TCM translation very well. More importantly, the adoption of translation methods is of great significance to us in completing TCM translation. However, it is difficult for people to fully grasp relevant knowledge and master professional terms, and understand cultural differences. Thus, related practitioners should cope with such difficulties if they want to spread TCM better. Based on the analysis of *The Yellow Emperor's Canon Internal Medicine* translated by Liansheng Wu and Qi Wu, it's easy to find that some methods adopted in their works is beneficial to solving the mentioned problems. First, when it comes to knowledge of TCM, some distinct problems in translation appear. However, you can overcome them by insist on studying and practicing. Second, towards issues aroused by different cultures, people can deal with them through amplification and conversion method delivered by Liansheng Wu and Qi Wu. Because both of them aims to provide texts to which target readers are familiar, so discrepancy in culture can be faded away to some degree. Third, professional terms are of vital importance for TCM translation. If ambiguities exist in the translation of professional terms, it will be hard for readers to understand. Thus, the application of transliteration method is quite necessary at this time. What's more, it is good to retain the original meaning and tones of source language, which is beneficial to spreading TCM and its culture worldwide. Finally, repetition method sometimes can be applied to making

passage more fluently and original meaning more clearly.

## AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTIONS

Yishan Yang finished the draft, Ya Liu contributed to revising.

## REFERENCES

- [1] Baker, Mona. *Encyclopedia of Translation Studies*[M]. London: Routledge, 1998.
- [2] Nida, E. A. *Language, Culture and Translating*[M]. Shanghai: Shanghai Foreign Language Education Press. 1981.
- [3] Nord, C. *Text analysis in translation, methodology and didactic application of a model for translation-oriented text analysis*[M]. Amsterdam: Rodopi. 2005.
- [4] Sijia Cao. The Application of Functional equivalence Theory in the E-C Edition of the *Treatise on Febrile Diseases*[J]. Hunan Journal of Traditional Chinese Medicine, 2019: 82- 84.
- [5] Zhiqian Cao, The Brief Introduction of the Thought of Nida's Functional Equivalence Theory[J]. Literatures 2015(10): 177- 178.
- [6] Wenlei Gong, The Brief Introduction of Nida's Functional Equivalence Theory[J]. Overseas English 2018(15): 106- 107.
- [7] Xuan Gong, The Study on Sentences in Medical English Translation under the Guidance of Functional Equivalence Theory[J]. Continuing Medical Education, 2018, 32(12): 58- 59.
- [8] Lu Tang, Lei Li, Hong Li, The Analysis of TCM Chinese Prose through Liansheng Wu's *The Yellow Emperor's Canon Internal Medicine*[J]. Hangzhou: Zhejiang Chinese Medical University, 2013: 85- 87.
- [9] Liansheng Wu, Qi Wu, The translation of *The Yellow Emperor's Internal Medicine*[M]. Beijing : China Science and technology press, 1997.
- [10] Manqi Xiong, *Doctrine of Shanhan*[M]. Beijing: China Traditional Chinese Medicine Publishing House, 2007.